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CHAPTER 11

RECLAIMING CITIZENSHIP THROUGH BORDERLANDS PEDAGOGY, STORYTELLING, AND PRAXIS

T. Mark Montoya

The Study of Monsters

On July 31, 2003, *The El Paso Times* reported on sightings of a Bigfoot-type creature in Horizon City, Texas.[1] Weeks earlier, *El Diario de Juárez* detailed rumors of chupacabra activity in a nearby rural area (Frontera Norte Sur 2003). Bigfoot and chupacabra legends have both intrigued and frightened many people. Like other monster stories, Bigfoot and chupacabra accounts may reveal our difficulties with the fear of the unknown, particularly in the U.S.-Mexico borderlands. Furthermore, these types of monster stories become metaphors for the many ambiguities everyday people face in the borderlands. For example, during a *CNN Live Today* segment, correspondent Ed Lavandera said of El chupacabra:

> Some are convinced it exists. But no one has ever seen it. It's like the Bigfoot of Latino culture. El Chupacabra also symbolizes the fear of something that doesn't exist. So, when illegal immigrants talk these days of widespread raids across the country, the Chupacabra effect is in full force. Illegal immigrants are convinced they're randomly being rounded up by immigration officers. (Lavandera 2006)

In hindsight, Lavandera was incorrect about a couple of things. First, his use of the term "illegal immigrants" was quite questionable, even in

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2006. Second, his saying that raids were not happening paints a picture of an imaginary monster, yet a beast was there.

The monster was the 2005 anti-immigration Sensenbrenner Bill (HR 4437—Border Protection, Antiterrorism, and Illegal Immigration Control Act of 2005). The bill was unabashedly a mean-spirited, race-mongering piece of legislation passed by the U.S. House of Representatives aimed specifically at "illegal immigrants." In this case, the choice of those words was quite purposeful. While the bill did not pass the U.S. Senate, Sensenbrenner was less an effect than it was a reality. El chupacabra lived. Whether two decades ago or any time before and after, monster stories permeate our collective consciousness, and at the U.S.-Mexico borderlands there is no shortage of monsters, sometimes imagined but often very real. Yet there are also the stories we convey—tales of resistance, accounts of empowerment, and the words of everyday people. There is indeed a culture and practice of storytelling in the borderlands, and these stories become borderlands pedagogy (Ortiz 2023; Rojas and Liou 2023; Zúñiga, Ostorga, and Hinton 2023). While fear-mongering attitudes create monstrous policies, our stories matter as we set to reclaim the borderlands. Borderlands pedagogy is an avenue for including our counterstories in contesting the "othering" policies in the U.S.-Mexico borderlands, because our stories are a lived experience. Counternarratives are borderlands pedagogy.

The issue, much like the citizenship regime—who counts as a citizen and why—is that those who get to tell the stories are those who get to be full citizens (see, for example, Hackl 2022; Peck and Hammett 2022).[2] Monster stories can certainly be cause for alarm; and for many citizens, trepidation sustains an ill-defined narrative of the U.S.-Mexico borderlands as unsafe, unsecured, and unlawful. In the process, the stories codify (im)migrants, people of color, queer folk, and so on as monsters. Thus, the current exchange of fear sustains odious politics affecting far too many "noncitizens."

Given the monstrous conditions of the citizenship regime, both historical and current, how should we teach about racism in the U.S.-Mexico borderlands? The borders we create are exclusive and are furthermore manifestations of colonization, imperialism, and racial stratification, but borderlands are much more nebulous. Such is the case of the U.S.-Mexico borderlands. As such, we find ourselves at *another* critical mo-

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ment. I emphasize the word *another* because fear-mongering attitudes and policies have incessantly constructed nonwhite folks and countless "others" outside the U.S. citizenship regime as menacing. While the U.S. citizenship regime racializes being undocumented, discriminatory conditions against Mexicans, Mexican Americans, Indigenous folks, and racialized "others" persist despite citizenship status and a sense of belonging (Montoya 2016; 2020). The growing monstrosity of the citizenship regime does not grant many of its people full citizenship. This is because citizenship is *not* a neutral concept (Hackl 2022). Taking a borderlands pedagogy approach, one that speaks truth to power to exchange ideas and move toward social justice (Elenes 2003; Giroux 1992; Romero and Téllez 2017; Solorzano and Yasso 2002), one that uses lived experiences as a primary source for theorizing (Williams 2018), we can teach about racism through the discourse of the citizenship regime to fight racism at the U.S.-Mexico borderlands and beyond.

When Injustice Becomes Law

The Historical Context of the Citizenship Regime

The first issue is to understand whose stories are told and why. As illustrated in the previous section, the nation-state has the upper hand when it comes to storytelling (Gallard Martínez and Chapman 2023). This may be why those who control the narrative remain at the center of who is granted full citizenship. As such, challenges to the citizenship regime, whether it is critical race theory or queer theory, are demonized, shunned, and in some cases banned. The conflict is one between nation-states and everyday people. The further issue is that the citizenship regime will divide everyday people through the creation of monsters. Hence, we often see a storytelling discourse of "real" America versus the "other" America. If we trace the evolution of these stories in the United States, we see the "Make America Great Again" crowd and those adjacent to it sharpen this rhetoric. The narrative has always been present and usually targets immigrants.

To be sure, immigration and citizenship are not the same thing, yet they encompass a shared realm of (not) belonging, without any just clarity (Montoya 2016; 2020). Understanding the U.S. citizenship regime thus re-

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quires understanding the conflicting stories and competing national and racial identities of those who count as citizens (Hackl 2022). The U.S.-Mexico border is, arguably, the most politically disputed region in North America. Take, for instance, the diverse claims made in the borderlands in terms of historical presence, national identity, and legal status. First, the borderlands are a geographical area initially settled by Indigenous nations that have kept a sovereign and territorial tie to the land. Second, because of historical circumstances, the borderlands are a unique enclave of Mexican cultural identities and hence the emblematic homeland of Chicanxs. Finally, the borderlands remain a U.S. settlement, an area where colonized residents are reconstituted as "American" and where U.S. military and militaristic presence (e.g., the U.S. Border Patrol) is still strongest (Masco 1999, 205–6). These historical narratives have evolved into stories and are often presented as counternarratives, aiming to challenge the citizenship regime (see also Gallard Martínez and Chapman [2023]).

The citizenship regime explains the abilities of nation-states to limit the range of citizenship to fixed and racialized categories. In traditional terms, the citizenship regime builds upon conceptual legal definitions of who the nation-state includes or excludes from a specific political community. This means the citizenship regime names who and what a citizen is, the rules and laws of citizenship, and the meanings of the nation-state and its borders (Jenson and Papillon 2000, 246; Shaw and Štiks 2013; Vink 2017). Furthermore, the citizenship regime creates horrifically racialized ambiguities for those who have crossed the border and for those whom the border has crossed (e.g., Mexican Americans). While the citizenship regime, as a concept, a system, and a discourse has rematerialized in the United States and elsewhere with divisive debates concerning its meanings, its efficacy, and its legacy, often in the guise of immigration control, border walls, and border enforcement, it drives the dynamics of who gets to narrate and design the story of citizenship. Indeed, the evolution of these storytelling tactics is such that they continue to inform not only racist rhetoric but also racialized policies and laws.

Because of ambiguities in the U.S. Constitution, legal precedent has tried to clarify most citizenship rules in the United States. Decisions of the U.S. Supreme Court constitute binding standards; yet, citizenship policies have come with differing success rates, particularly in terms

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of their meanings, ideals, and application. The U.S. Constitution does not make clear who a citizen is as much as it elucidates who is not. At present, the following persons are *not* entitled to U.S. citizenship: those born in the United States to foreign diplomats and those born in the United States to enemy forces should that outside entity hold the U.S. government in hostile occupation (*Elk v. Wilkins* 1884; *United States v. Wong Kim Ark* 1898). A current point of contention, notably, is the status of children born to undocumented immigrants in the United States. In *Plyler v. Doe* (1982), the Supreme Court ruled that "illegal" immigrants are "within the jurisdiction" of the state in which they live and therefore subject to the authority of the United States. The Plyler ruling, nonetheless, did not explicitly address the citizenship status of children born in the United States to undocumented immigrants, although it did imply they qualify for citizenship under the Fourteenth Amendment. The ruling thus left what we call "birthright citizenship" open to interpretation. In reaction, anti-immigrant politicians have proposed a reexamination of the precedent and have linked the racially charged term "anchor babies" to collapsing state budgets. Again, the story is that immigration is the cause of "our" economic insecurities. Even former President Donald J. Trump called birthright citizenship the "biggest magnet for illegal immigration" (Trump 2015b, 4). In this case, proponents of abolishing birthright citizenship frame citizens in terms of "respecting" and "obeying" the laws of the United States (Haynes et al. 2016).

How governments enforce and securitize boundaries relates to the notion of belonging and indeed, *not* belonging. Implicit, then, to the citizenship regime is the racialized dehumanization of noncitizens, including immigrants (Hackl 2022; Peck and Hammett 2022). For example, Trump portrayed immigrants and refugees as less than human, saying, "We have people coming into the country, or trying to come in. . . . You wouldn't believe how bad these people are. These aren't people. These are animals" (Trump 2018). Additionally, in a June 19, 2018, tweet, Trump compared migrants and refugees to pests who will "pour into and infest our country." Trump's comments came as he continued to defend his "zero-tolerance" immigration detention policy, which separated immigrant children from their parents as federal agents at once prosecuted and detained them.

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Great Walls, Taco Trucks, and Bad Hombres

Because of these types of stories, many continually vilify immigrants and their children as monsters who steal American jobs, take advantage of the American welfare system, and destroy American culture; in this case, the term *American* becomes synonymous with whiteness. For example, in June 2015, while announcing his candidacy for president, Trump made opposition to Mexican immigration to the United States a pillar of his campaign: "When Mexico sends its people, they're not sending the best. They're sending people that have lots of problems and they're bringing those problems. They're bringing drugs, they're bringing crime. They're rapists and some, I assume, are good people." In the same speech, Trump declared that due to his real estate experience, he was uniquely qualified to build a wall along the United States' southern border: "I will build a great, great wall on our southern border, and I will make Mexico pay for that wall" (Trump 2015a). Furthermore, Mexican-born Marco Gutierrez, an organizer of Latinos for Trump, suggested that without Trump in the White House, there would be "taco trucks on every corner" (Gutierrez 2016). Gutierrez's claim was swiftly ridiculed on social media outlets: who would not want taco trucks on every corner? Still, during the last presidential debate with Democratic candidate Hillary Clinton, Trump doubled down, saying, "We're going to secure the border, and once the border is secured at a later date, we'll make a determination as to the rest. But we have some bad hombres here and we're going to get them out" (Trump 2016b).

We have seen the videos and have read the transcripts, but many may not know that the narrative was remarkably like the language the state of Arizona used to garner support for the country's harshest anti-immigration state senate bill, "Support Our Law Enforcement and Safe Neighborhoods Act," also known as Arizona Senate Bill 1070 or SB1070. Here was a story based on fear of the other, a real and racialized terror endured by many people in Arizona. While the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that federal laws preempted most of SB 1070, the 2016 federal elections drastically changed immigration and border policies. For example, within a week of his inauguration, Trump signed executive orders to cut funding to sanctuary cities, build the wall on the southern border, and ban immigration from six Muslim-majority countries.

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However, as one can deduce, apprehension, detention, incarceration, internment, and deportation were nothing new. Officially known as An Act Respecting Alien Enemies of 1789, the "Enemy Aliens Act" is still law, often enforced during wartime. Note that in any border conflict, including immigration, war is a defining story. The Enemy Aliens Act authorizes the president to apprehend indefinitely and deport resident aliens if their home countries are at war with the United States, in cases where they may have displayed disloyalty, committed crimes, or taken part in suspicious actions (Cole 2003, 7). At no time did the United States more rationalize and overtly racialize the act than through the Japanese American internment during World War II (and let us not forget that several camps were on federally designated Indigenous Reservations).

The power of the "enemy aliens" story led Trump to call for "extreme vetting" of refugees during his presidential campaign, and many of his supporters advocated for registries of immigrants from Muslim-majority countries, as Islam was treated as a threat. Evoking American patriotism, the story of racist anti-immigration sentiment seeks to protect "our" borders from "foreign" invasion; furthermore, by appropriating the language of humanitarian groups, those who promulgate this narrative often claim they are "bettering" or even "saving" lives. Supporters of Trump's separation of undocumented immigrant families likened detention centers for migrant children to summer camps with conditions far better than in their home countries (Frej 2018). This symbolic racism has vast implications for the citizenship regime, as it relates to immigration policies; unsurprisingly, deportations formed a key part of Trump's immigration policy.

While the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals halted Trump's travel ban, massive deportation and intensified border control continued, creating a worst-case scenario for migrants. In late January 2016, immigration officials arrested hundreds of undocumented immigrants across the country in a sequence of raids that represented a sweeping enforcement of Trump's January 25 order to crack down on the estimated 11 million undocumented immigrants living in the United States (Trump 2017). For millions of undocumented immigrants, the future augured the deportation for upwards of eight million people, with millions more affected. For example, on February 15, 2017, Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) officers raided and arrested folks in a trailer park on the outskirts of Las Cruces, New Mexico. Rumors proliferated that ICE would

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be conducting more raids. This did not happen. However, the next day the Las Cruces public schools saw twenty-one hundred of its twenty-five thousand students miss school due to fears of mass deportations (Blitzer 2017). Undeniably, the fear was real, as was the chupacabra effect.

While President Trump's and his surrogates' narratives and actions focus intensely on the border, long-term racial processes and political transformations have had enormous consequences for everyday people in the borderlands, as illustrated by stories surrounding detainees, family separation, and a zero-tolerance immigration policy (Department of Homeland Security 2018). By mid-June 2018, the Trump administration blamed Democrats and Congress for an emerging immigrant crisis, which was arguably his design, as photos of immigrant children in cages and stories of "tender age shelters" went viral. Trump said, "Under current law, we have only two policy options to respond to this massive crisis. [. . .] totally open borders or criminal prosecution for law-breaking" (qtd. in Collinson et al. 2018). Several days later, Trump changed course, and on June 20, 2018, signed an executive order declaring it is his administration's policy to "maintain family unity," including detaining entire families together "where appropriate and consistent with law and available resources" (qtd. in Collinson et al. 2018). While this was a major retreat by Trump, immigration policy via the citizenship regime remained a volatile issue.

To be fair, many of Trump's orders were an extension of the earlier presidential administration's policies. President Barack Obama carried out three million deportations and President George W. Bush expanded the border wall begun under President Bill Clinton's administration: the list goes on. Without a doubt, the narrative of a nation-state involves the creation of an "other." While President Joe Biden has sidestepped the rhetoric, policy changes have been rare. Furthermore, any legislative changes would have to include an underlying transformation of the current immigration system *and* the citizenship regime. Unfortunately, history provides plenty of reasons to doubt that such change is forthcoming.

Anti-Immigration Stories and Their Discontents

The perceived escalation of immigration to the United States has important policy implications for the citizenship regime. For instance, the ques-

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tion is how new immigrants (both documented and undocumented) can become citizens, how they will practice their citizenship, and whether new immigrants will keep social and political ties with their home country. Of course, the racism question still permeates the discourse of belonging/not belonging (Montoya 2016; 2020). Because even if you do belong—are legally a citizen—Trump reminded us that "African Americans, Hispanics are living in hell because it's so dangerous. You walk down the street, you get shot" (Trump 2016a). This narrative highlights the bigoted conceptions of citizenship in the United States. Citizenship has never been a static construct; indeed, in many cases it has been an arbitrary and racist concept. This is because, for many, those who cross the border "illegally" are by definition not worthy of citizenship. The story is quite simple: immigrants should obey our laws. Sure, but laws are laws because the United States government says so. Yet laws continuously change, citizenship rights have changed, and immigration laws should change. Racism, on the other hand, seems static.

A racialized discourse remains pervasive, mirroring how the United States has struggled to balance liberty with security. The position of individuals' legal status and what laws and rights apply to individual people can vary widely. This variation is reflected in the many terms used to refer to individual legal status: native-born citizen, naturalized citizen, dual-citizen, alien, migrant worker, refugee, illegal immigrant, criminal, prisoner, slave, or political prisoner (with the subcategories enemy alien, enemy combatant, administrative detainee) (Cole 2003). It is important to note here that immigrant detainees, including children, are in effect political prisoners. Added to these legal terms are sociopolitical and racialized terms such as immigrant, illegal, poor, second-class citizen, terrorist, anti-American, or even anti-Trump. The problem with these types of terms, warns David Cole (2003), is that "we all too often strike the balance between liberty and security by trading *their* liberties for *our* security, by treating some . . . as less deserving of liberty, less *human*, than the rest of us" (xv; emphasis in original). Cole continues, "What we are willing to allow our government to do to immigrants today creates a template for how it will treat citizens tomorrow" (7).

U.S. immigration policies are implicitly meant to prevent migration from Mexico and other Latin American countries, through the deployment of more agents (INS, Border Patrol, Customs, police, and military),

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physical barriers (walls, fences, and stricter border checkpoints), and surveillance (helicopters, night-vision equipment, and motion detection technologies). "These changes," argue Massey, Durand, and Malone (2003, 2), have been "enacted largely for symbolic political purposes." What is much more important is that the policies provide many anti-immigrant groups with justification for equating immigration, both "legal" and "illegal," with criminality, building upon existing fears (Loyd et al. 2012); they have also led to the countless deaths of migrants crossing the southwestern American desert (Mountz 2012, 97). *In short, even if an immigrant has U.S. citizenship, they are now susceptible to detention, imprisonment, and eventual deportation without recourse* (Borderlands Autonomist Collective 2012, 194–97). Indeed, the U.S. government has often targeted noncitizens *and* citizens of color through varying measures of racial discrimination, most of which violate their liberties (Goodman 2023). As illustrated here, the U.S. narrative on migration is often both uninformed and misinformed. Migration to the United States has been a long, historical, and legal process. While various laws, acts, and policies make it more difficult for migrants to enter the United States, they are not deterred, often entering through Arizona's harsh desert, only to meet more cruelty after they make it to "the other side"; if they, indeed, make it. This is the saddest of stories.

When Injustice Remains Law

Remapping the Citizenship Regime

The ways we tell the stories of borders reflect the context in which nation-states define citizenship. For instance, wars, economic growth or decline, and migration have contributed to the meanings of citizenship, making for a complex and contentious citizenship regime, particularly in the United States (Roy 2022). Accompanied by all the convoluted stories we tell, the United States has built more walls, both physical and ethereal. The focus is no longer on integration but on national security (Payan 2016, 13–15). As part of the narrative of protecting *our* borders, the U.S.-Mexico borderlands have particularly come under increased scrutiny, as have the people who cross the border into the United States from Mexico. Perceived cultural and racial threats justify the creation of

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monsters in the borderlands. Furthermore, the discourse increasingly contains claims that these fiends are drastically changing the cultural and racial landscape of the United States, without any consideration of the Indigenous lands in which we dwell and without any reflection upon the transformed *global flows of capital and information, global migration patterns, and the new realities of diasporas that we have created*.

We cannot take for granted, for example, that global borders have changed since the formation of the modern nation-state system, and often at the expense of Indigenous peoples (including Mexicans) through conquest, colonization, imperialism, and racism. As a result of these factors, a distinct pattern of fragmentation and social inequalities characterizes the U.S.-Mexico borderlands (see, for example, Heyman 2017, 52–53). Furthermore, the current border that the United States and Mexico share shapes the social, economic, and political developments of its respective countries; but it has especially been subject to the influence of the United States. The U.S. citizenship regime, likewise, highlights the inequalities by constructing Mexicans, immigrants, and border crossers as suspects. Suspicion, in fact, is an essential part of the citizenship regime, as it facilitates the separation of the in-group from the out-group (Spiess 2013, 58).

The resulting story calls for defending, guarding, and eventually walling up the entirety of the U.S.-Mexico border. Lest we forget, it will be a great wall! Additionally, the racist sentiment undergirding this narrative includes the belief that Mexican and other Latin American migrants—many of whom are Indigenous peoples—are a burden on the welfare system and undeserving recipients of public goods rather than pawns of cheap labor and producers of cheap products (Heyman 2017, 46–48). The story exposes a racialized anti-immigration strategy that speaks to several prejudices, including the idea immigrants are a damaging aspect of U.S. life; the impression that the borderlands are chaotic; and the sense that border-crossers are criminals, threatening the lives of "real" U.S. citizens (Loyd, Mitchelson, and Burridge 2012). As illustrated by the official policies guided by this racist sentiment, the political effects are clear; anti-immigration militants are undertaking concerted efforts to construct citizenship through the exclusion and even elimination of the noncitizen. The monster under the bed, it seems, is the citizenship regime, not immigrants.

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Policy Recommendations and Borderlands Pedagogy

Borderlands pedagogy builds upon cultural citizenship theories that help us see that citizenship and immigration are part of discriminatory stories, both within the borderlands and beyond (Elenes 2003; Giroux 1992; Solorzano and Yasso 2002). In my view, borderlands pedagogy helps us recognize that the connection of our stories to power is important. Similarly, from an ethnic studies approach, Andrea Romero and Michelle Téllez (2017) write, "Ethnic Studies has developed effective nontraditional classroom teaching strategies that can be adopted by other disciplines in order to move our academic environments into the new political environment. These strategies move students to wake up to existing systemic problems in society and to develop action-based skills to work towards social justice."

Furthermore, borderlands pedagogy offers a critique of the citizenship regime as a restrictive discourse of membership and, hence, helps to conceptualize the possibilities of rethinking the movement of people. Our stories inform political knowledge and, hence, action. Challenging the citizenship regime requires a differentiated approach, including recognizing citizenship as a racialized identity and moving citizenship beyond the nation-state (Goodman 2023). For its part, borderlands pedagogy suggests the breaking down—or the deconstruction—of rigid theoretical and methodological models (Elenes 2003; Giroux 1992; Solorzano and Yasso 2002). Even the normative structures of boundaries must undergo deconstruction. This, however, is not to suggest physical boundaries are ending; it is instead a call for them to end. The era of a "borderless" world is still only a possibility to come.

From the vantage point of a borderlands pedagogy, citizenship is not solely the outcome of formalized politics; instead, it is central to the efforts of social movements that redefine the meaning and the limits of the political system itself (Alvarez et al. 1998, 7). Key here is the concept of cultural citizenship, which can be characterized by its search for alternative forms of "doing politics," in a variety of cultural contexts and against totalizing projects of order and power (Slater 1998, 381). Reexaminations of such concepts as democracy and citizenship challenge the citizenship regime through a redefinition of such "notions as rights, public and private spaces, forms of sociability, ethics, equality and difference, and

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so on" (Alvarez, Dagnino, and Escobar 1998, 10). The discursive productions of "sameness" produce the citizenship regime, but borderlands pedagogy challenges this notion. For example, relentless calls for a unified nation-state identity have sought to create an assumed broader, yet truly narrow sense of "we" that often reinforces the marginalization of alternative—often racialized—identities. Whether we call it nationalism, national identity, or national culture, stories of membership materialize through practices of regulation and control by the nation-state and its institutions. This is especially true when labeling gendered, sexual, racial, and "other" identities as threats, which is illustrated by Trump's policies of sustained reinforcement of not only the citizenship regime but also of marginalized peoples (LGBTQIA+, women, poor folks, immigrants, and so on).

Even with these continual monstrous policies, however, immigrants are often desperate enough to do anything to enter the United States; and despite the many walls and obstacles put in their way, migrants making their way into the United States often see detainment and deportation as part of the process of getting to the other side. In addition, these journeys do not account for the ways the receiving country itself is transformed, through investment *and* intervention by the sending country. In other words, the United States also inadvertently pushes immigrants out of Mexico and other Latin American countries (Staudt 2018, 62–63).

The border has remained both secured and unsecured, depending on American economic interests. It has also been the subject of contradictory policies, such as Operation Wetback (massive deportations in 1954), which happened during the Bracero Program (a welcoming of workers from Mexico from 1942 to 1964).[3] Also, perceived increases in refugee and migration flows have led to concentrated efforts to close the border, often not accounting for costs, environmental risks, and Indigeneity. Indeed, the word "immigrant" is problematic in understanding the stories of Mexican people, especially if we are to understand them as colonized people. However, the issue of migration is complex and intertwined with stories of fear and invasion. Even though conditions deteriorated during Trump's time in office, the situation was not fully resolved with President Biden. It is further unsurprising that targeting the most vulnerable is seen as a "viable" political strategy, but it also exposes the weakness of those in power.

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We are, indeed, at *another* critical moment, one that forces us to consider how the citizenship regime frames and racializes migrants, refugees, and "others." People in the United States had been living in Trump's America even before Trump. We can only hope that this vision is not the future of America, whereby the borderlands become a laboratory for more vitriolic rhetoric. As the U.S. government has often contradicted classic principles of U.S. democratic theory by upholding discriminatory barriers and racist policies, creating monsters in their wake. However, borderlands pedagogy allows us to deploy *our* stories as we try to reclaim the borderlands, and especially as we rethink the stories of the last two centuries (Gallard Martínez and Chapman 2023). As such, we persist in (re)claiming our citizenship rights through borderlands pedagogy.

The borderlands have been problematic, but they are also a location of hope, innovative and brave organizing, and resistance. The borderlands have something to offer. We have something to offer. The struggle should be about our lived experiences, specifically those that oppose the systemic and racialized issues of citizenship. Immigration reform and immigration policies alone will not get rid of racism, and *this* is the problem. Indeed, immigration reform and policies themselves reinforce the citizenship regime. Difference, however, is not dangerous, and the U.S-Mexico borderlands have shown themselves to be a beacon of hope because of differentiated citizenships—citizenships on our terms. A continued focus on our stories thus presses us to produce new methods to explain new phenomena and to develop new techniques to respond to old challenges in and around the U.S.-Mexico borderlands. Borderlands pedagogy offers interesting perspectives, allowing us to analyze and explain cross-border movements and examine the political, economic, and social interactions of people living in the borderlands. More importantly, they emphasize the need to transgress the citizenship regime and confront, challenge, and cross borders (Montoya 2016; 2020).

The policy recommendations are quite simple. We as educators and policymakers must confidently recognize our value in promoting social justice, equity, and empowerment by highlighting the voices and experiences of borderlands peoples, especially those from marginalized communities. Their/our counterstories can, indeed, challenge dominant narratives and reframe the discourse. Furthermore, policymakers should examine the history of the border, including the ways bound-

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aries were imposed and changed over time. This can shed light on how power dynamics have shaped the region, particularly as policymakers analyze border policies, discourses, and enforcement practices and their connections to broader systems of oppression and control. Policymakers and educators must reflect on who is included/excluded, as we articulate nuanced perspectives and therefore humanize borderlands residents, avoiding deficit narratives or depicting border communities as just sites of violence and conflict. Finally, as educators, the key is to engage students in questioning dominant narratives and ideologies while uplifting counterstories and perspectives that challenge racism and exclusion in nuanced ways. Borderlands pedagogy should empower students to rethink identities, boundaries, and our shared humanity.

The Study of Humans Being

Stories about the U.S.-Mexico borderlands have been in discord even before the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, which ended the U.S.-Mexico War. Jaime E. Rodriguez and Kathryn Vincent (1997, 10) write, "Whereas the leaders of newly independent Mexico looked to their northern neighbor with expectations of friendship and collaboration, most citizens of the United States perceived the southern republic as one peopled by degenerate, inferior Catholic mongrels, who, like the Indians, did not deserve to retain their land." Monsters, if you will. While the story of the United States is one as a model for democracy, opportunity, and development, "others" encounter disdain, bigotry, arrogance, fear, and racism. Indeed, ethnocentrism and racism have been an underlining subtheme of U.S.-Mexican relations, as foregrounded by racist storytelling and wall-building narratives. The border wall is a manifestation of the power of storytelling that generates fear and upholds racism, but the power of storytelling also creates myriad counternarratives, which in turn produce the art and activism we see at the border wall. They, furthermore, create alternative ways of learning by reclaiming our stories and using them as tools for liberation.

To be sure, however, there are several walls on the U.S.-Mexico border, which is a series of fences, drones, personnel, checkpoints, and so on. These border walls are a continuation of attempts to set up control and

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order on the U.S.-Mexico border, both externally *and* internally. Furthermore, the criminalization of those who challenge the authority of the United States is part of the logic of citizenship that promotes the gradation of membership in the United States and legitimately sets up a citizenship regime. As noted throughout, however, this is by no means the first time that the United States has sacrificed citizenship rights in the name of national security; nor with President Biden does it seem to be the last. The politics of (not) belonging continually contradict the United States' democratic principles. But then again, "democracy" only seems to work under a racialized structure. Indeed, border walls continue to be a structural, racial, violent, and physical manifestation of the citizenship regime; and the citizenship regime has significant implications for border people. The walls also reach beyond the border to form multiple borderlands of race, class, and gender, which monstrously affect all folks, as they continuously monitor, police, control, and exclude them (us). Ultimately, we can learn from borderlands stories as we see the United States has always been a borderland—a monster of a place to live.

Notes

1. This chapter and some of the stories told are derived, in part, from my dissertation (Montoya 2009).
2. Citizenship regime refers to the laws and regulations that govern citizenship in a particular country. It outlines how citizenship is acquired and defines the rights and obligations that come with it.
3. Operation Wetback was a brief campaign to remove Mexican immigrants from the United States, while the Bracero Program allowed Mexican citizens to work temporarily in U.S. agriculture.

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